

Sirs, Madam,

Why should giant phone and cable companies be permitted to be the Internet's gatekeepers? In the past, they have discriminated against content, applications, and services in competition that have hurt their bottom line. Giant phone and cable companies see consumer's high-speed internet connection as their new source of revenue and are working hard to kill Net Neutrality.

For one to understand Net Neutrality, and how Net Neutrality affects internet users, one must know how the internet and its connections work. The internet is basically a worldwide system of interconnected computers, forming a global network. In order for an internet user's computer to connect to other computers, a modem is needed. A modem is a communication device either built into the computer, or can be external. The modem converts signals or data from the computer to signals that can be transmitted over a phone line. This is commonly called a dial-up connection. The dial-up modem is becoming obsolete due to their slow speeds, and is being replaced with cable and Digital Subscriber Lines (DSL) modems. Also needed is an Internet Service Provider (ISP). The ISP is a company that charges a fee to access the internet. The ISP is the gateway to the internet. With most dial-up modems, any ISP can be used, and is ultimately the customer's choice. This could change if Net Neu!

trality is not enacted, requiring a customer to use the Internet Service Provider's equipment and service, such is the case now with most cable and satellite television providers. This has already become the case with most cable modems, and some DSL providers such as Qwest and AT and T.

“What is Net Neutrality?” one might ask. Net Neutrality is the principle of a free and open Internet (Free Press, 2009, ¶ 1). According to Mike Murray, who is co-chairman of Hands off the Internet, “There are people who believe that [Net Neutrality] is a sacrosanct principle that defines the Internet as it is today” (Bauman, 2006, ¶ 3). Net Neutrality means no discrimination. Net Neutrality means protecting the consumer against Internet service providers attempt to block competitor's services. Net Neutrality protects the freedom of the Internet and assures that data is not discriminated against as to content, its source, ownership, or destination. Net Neutrality has driven innovation and free speech online. Net Neutrality has protected consumers from interference from network providers no matter what the content, application, or service.

The giant cable and phone companies want to be Internet gatekeepers. They want to decide which web sites go slow or fast, or will be permitted to go at all. Giant cable and phone companies want to tax content providers to assure their data receives priority or a speedy delivery. Giant phone and cable companies want to give priority to their own search engines, Internet phone services, and streaming media while blocking those of their competitors (Free Press, 2009, ¶ 7). Bauman (2006) a professor and writer for Information Today stated, “Service providers want to divide the Internet into a fast lane, and a slow lane, creating a two-tier Internet”. Dysart (2008) who writes for the New York Times stated, “In this way, telecommunications companies can give preference to those that pay, and block web sites for those who don't”. VOIP (Voice over Internet Protocol), which is used by Internet phone service providers such as Vonage, Magic Jack, and Skype, have had th!

air services blocked (Multinational Monitor, 2008, ¶ 2), and is a service that provides person-to-person communication (P2P) through video or voice services.

What does all this have to do with us, the consumer? Imagine having to make a call on one's only phone which just happens to be a Vonage, Magic Jack, or Skype phone (Internet phone), and having that call blocked or dropped. What if the call were an emergency? What if it were a doctor, or if calling in a prescription or other health related issue? What if it were a counselor or representative from school? Get the point? The consequences of not getting through could be devastating, or life changing, not to mention the fact that one's right to use these services has just been taken away.

The big cable and phone companies claim decades of time and money have gone into upgrading their networks and therefore they should have the right to protect those networks and profit from them. They claim they are the backbone of the Internet. They claim they should be allowed to profit by offering new and compelling services. They claim a two-tier Internet would provide high priority web sites, (to the ones who pay) a guarantee of quality service, speed, frequency, and reliability of data delivered. They claim this would offer high quality live TV and video conferencing, or could allow for live, unimpeded, medical monitoring. Cable and phone providers claim today's Internet is unreliable and plagued with delays (Epstein, 2006, ¶ 4).

But what about the consumer, student, or otherwise financially challenged who cannot afford broadband, or a high-speed internet connection. For schools unable to pay for extra bandwidth in a two-tier Internet, could find navigating their web site more difficult, if not slower. A once quick broadband connection would feel more like a dial-up connection. According to Tim Colletti, director of media and technology at South High School in Pueblo, Colorado, "But so many schools now have web sites and have moved their computer networking to the Internet, it looks like a two-tiered Internet will have a pretty adverse effect" (Dysart, 2008, ¶ 6). Many claim competing Internet service provider customers would have slow, patchy service, or would be in the slow lane (Epstein, 2006, ¶ 2). The cable and phone companies claim this to be a smokescreen, perpetuated by the Net Neutrality advocates. Cable and phone giants claim that if not given the right to charge for extra bandwidth,

that providing services as it now stands would be akin to commercial suicide. Imagine being stuck with a broadband connection that feels more like dial-up because of a lack of funds (bottom or lower tier), and being well off and having all the speed you need and then some because you could pay (top or upper tier). To those who are not well off, or struggling, the two-tier system does not seem fair at all.

For cable and phone companies to be allowed to control the speed and content of the Internet would be a significant development. As it stands now, Internet service providers in the United States are already some of the slowest in the world, with the United States rated at number 26 in the world for available bandwidth and the speed at which data is received, or downloaded, and rated at number 30 at the rate data is uploaded, or transmitted.

Top Countries by Download Speed

## Megabytes Per Second

1. Republic of Korea 21.17
2. Japan 15.82
3. Aland Islands 15.26
4. Lithuania 13.20
5. Sweden 13.08
6. Latvia 12.92
7. Romania 12.54
8. Netherlands 11.87
9. Bulgaria 11.80
10. Republic of Moldova 9.72
11. Hong Kong 9.35
12. Slovakia 8.65
13. Germany 8.31
26. United States 6.85

Source: Speedtest.net

## Top Countries by Upload Speed Megabytes Per Second

1. Lithuania 8.93
2. Japan 7.15
3. Bulgaria 5.59
4. Latvia 5.27
5. Aland Islands 5.25
6. Hong Kong 5.00
7. Romania 4.95
8. Russian Federation 4.70
9. Sweden 4.70
10. Slovenia 4.52
11. Andorra 4.09
12. Moldova, Republic of 3.64
13. Netherlands 3.22
30. United States 1.55

Source: Speedtest.net

There is a battle on the hill! Are government regulators and the Federal Communication

Commission going to decide the fate of the Internet in the United States? In the past, the Federal Communication Commission has gotten involved, ruling in favor of consumers and Net Neutrality. In August of 2008, the FCC ruled, "Comcast's management of its broadband Internet networks contravenes federal policies that protect the vibrant and open nature of the Internet" (Multinational Monitor, 2008, ¶ 1). In the August 2008 FCC ruling, the FCC found:

That Comcast had deployed equipment throughout its network to monitor the content of its customers' Internet connections, and selectively block specific types of connections known as peer-to-peer connections. "Would you be OK with the post office opening your mail," asked FCC Chair Kevin Martin, "deciding they didn't want to bother delivering it, and hiding that fact by sending it back to you stamped 'address unknown' return to sender'. Or if they opened letters mailed to you, decided that because the mail truck is full sometimes, letters to you could wait, and then hid both that they read your letters and delayed them." (Multinational Monitor, 2008, ¶ 4-5).

According to Mady (2009), a writer for the Free Press and a member of the Save the Internet Coalition, big cable and telecoms are employing "Astroturf" groups. These are phony front groups paid by the telecom industry to spread misinformation about Net Neutrality. The Free Press claims corporations AT and T, Verizon, Comcast, Time Warner Cable, and Qwest are paying Astroturf groups to derail legislation aimed at passing Net Neutrality legislation. Advocates claim that these corporations are expending unheard of amounts of money to become the Internet's gatekeepers.

The Obama administration has expressed their commitment to an open and neutral internet. Many argue that it is an attempt to control content and hinder free speech, accusing the government of trying to be the internet police. This is not true and does just the opposite by promoting free speech and assuring that all Web sites and users are treated equally and without discrimination as to services, content, applications, or equipment used or attached to the internet, just as long as the equipment does not cause damage to the network. Without Net Neutrality the Federal communications Administration will be unable to prevent discrimination and Internet Service Providers will be free to choose who is heard, and who is not. The ISP's will decide what content is allowed and what is not.

The battle over the Internet, and the issue of where Net Neutrality stands, continues to this day. In August of 2009, Representatives Edward Markey (D-Mass.) and Anna Eshoo (D-Calif.) introduced the Internet Freedom Preservation Act of 2009 (H.R. 3458). The bill would protect Net Neutrality under the Communications Act (Free Press, 2009, p. 3, ¶ 7), assuring Internet freedom, and protecting consumers from online discrimination.

Net Neutrality

Senators For 21

Senators Against 13

Undecided 4

Source: Information Today  
August, 2009

The result of not having Net Neutrality could be a tragedy. New services and applications could be curtailed and competitors forced out of the market. Free data and other services would be limited to what the Internet service provider allowed. The consumer would no longer be able to choose their own services. Decisions that had once been made by the majority of Internet users will be made by telecom and cable company share holders and CEO's.

There appears to be no end in sight to the Net Neutrality debate, with advocates claiming phony front groups for the telecom industry spreading misinformation (Free Press, 2009), and cable, telephone, and internet service providers claiming that Net Neutrality will stifle profit and innovation (Epstein, 2006, Reject Net Neutrality to Preserve Internet Freedom, ¶ 2). It is anyone's guess when and how this political hot potato will play out. One thing is fairly likely, if not given the attention this issue calls for; ultimately, the consumer will pay.

## References

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Very Concerned,  
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